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SUBJECT Commentary: George F. Will on Nicaragua

PETER JENNINGS: George Will joins us tonight with a commentary from Washington.

George, the President doesn't look like he's doing too well on this debate over funding for Nicaraguan Contras with the Congress. Have you got any advice for him?

GEORGE F. WILL: Yes, fight harder, Peter.

Less than three months into his second term, he's in danger of suffering a stunning loss to his credibility by refusing to go to the country on television to make his case for aid to the Contras.

His aides are telling him he might lose. There are two answers to that: He might not. And second, there are things worse for a President than losing, and one of them is looking silly, and that's how President is beginning to look.

He's saying Nicaragua is a threat to the stability of the hemisphere, and ultimately our national security. He says the cause of the Contras is just. Indeed, they're the moral equivalent of the Founding Fathers. Yet, he will not use, evidently, his fundamental power. The only thing a President can do on his own is move the country, and by moving the country move Congress. He doesn't seem to want to do that.

Instead, he's negotiating ever more minute restrictions on this minute \$14 million of aid.

This isn't a compromise. It's a defeat for the President, and it's one that will have reverberations throughout his second term.

JENNINGS: George, thank you very much for joining us.